**Week 18**

 A  declarer play problem this week from one of my favourite writers Hugh Kelsey who had the gift of presenting problems of differing degrees of difficulty (some probably the most difficult presented anywhere) very clearly to the reader.

 You play in 5d with the following hands

 AK9xx

 Tx

 AQTx

 Jx

 Qx

 AQxx

 J9xxxx

 x

  There has been no opposition bidding and the lead is the CA followed by a low club which you ruff.

 One declarer finessed the DQ and when that succeeded but the  spades proved to be 4-2 eventually lost a heart since the king was offside so scored up 11 tricks and nothing more was said.

 What do you think of that line of play and can it be improved upon ?

 A better line of play is available which will succeed more often .The first two tricks are as above but rather than finessing in diamonds cash the DA leaving the king outstanding now play on spades and ruff the 4th round of the suit in hand establishing the long card. West refused to over ruff with the DK but now declarer simply threw him in with the DK and his next card was  fatal since the black suits are now  eliminated and west's  choice  is either a heart into the AQ or a ruff and discard enabling declarer to discard a heart from dummy and ruff in his hand so 5d made.

 The other hand:

 West

 Jx

 Kxxx

 Kx

 ATxxx

East

 T8xx

 Jxx

 x

 KQxxx

  In conclusion the first declarer would have gone down if East had held the singleton DK whilst the second would still make his contract .The play of the DA at trick 3 also gives an extra chance when East holds Kx in trumps since declarer can then  test the spades before needing to take the heart finesse since if spades are 3-3 all the hearts go away without the need to take the heart finesse.

 **Week 17**

 I wonder whether players realise that two much information can be a bad or dangerous thing in bridge. There are many hands where a partnership should go slowly and scientifically in order to work out the best contract typically because the best strain is unknown early on  but there are many others where it is better to bid 1s -4s or 1nt -3nt in order to minimise the information provided to the defence.

 The trick of course is to know which hands fall into which of these categories so to bid 1s -4s on a hand which is too strong may miss a slam.

A hand came up in a recent League match which illustrates the principle that too much knowledge can be  dangerous.

 xx

 JTxxx

 Ax

 T9xx

Imagine you hear the bidding go 1h -2d -4d -4s -5c -6d this is a natural sequence and you expect LHO to hold 9 or 10 red cards with probably longer hearts so in the absence of anything better to do you would probably select a black suit lead against the slam hoping to set up a trick for the defence there and you might lead either of the suits  .I would try a spade  as partner had a chance to double 5c but did not which is a  straw in the wind.

 Now consider the strong club auction which took place.

 1c -2d -2h -3c -3d  -3s -4c -4d -4s -6d .

I will provide a translation of the bidding

  1c ( strong and artificial )

  2d 8-11 points balanced

 2h 5+ hearts

 3c ( 4 diamonds !)

3d ( 4 card fit )

3s spade values for 3nt initially but he thought with a maximum he was a little too good to bid 3nt at this point which looks correct.

 4c cue bid

 4d waiting as the bidding is game forcing

 4s another cue bid

6d to play.

 Now  have you been listening after all this  information ?

LHO has 5-4 in the red suits together with controls in both black suits RHO has 4 or conceivably 5 poor  diamonds and a balanced hand so hey presto partner must hold a singleton heart so we lead one of those come in with the DA and give him a heart  ruff to set the slam a defence only really possible because of the information available.

The opposition hands were

Ax

 AKQxx

 KQxx

 Kx

Kxx

xx

JTxx

AQJx